BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Maki Nakamura, 83, retired movie theater concession owner, Lower Paia

> *"[Rent] was inexpensive at that time. It was $12.50 [a month]. At night it was troublesome to sell sushi there, so I changed to making sandwiches, which sold very good. There was a time when I sliced fifty loaves of bread a day."*

Maki Nakamura, Japanese, was born September 14, 1896, in Shiga Prefecture, Japan. Her parents owned a small store in the village.

In 1920, Nakamura came to Hawaii as a picture bride. At the time her husband was a cement worker at Maliko, Maui. From there, they moved to various places around the Paia area.

In 1936, Nakamura opened a small store, selling peanuts and candy, in Kobayashi Theater in Lower Paia. At the same time, she began making tōfu in a small house not far from the theater. Nakamura would peddle her tofu on a truck she drove herself. Her tōfu business lasted only a few years.

In 1941, she moved her concession to the then new Princess Theater. She was able to buy a potato chip machine and make her own potato chips, which she sold in her store in addition to candies and other snacks.

Nakamura closed the concession in 1968. Princess Theater still stands today, but it is used as a repair shop. Nakamura is retired and lives in Kahului. She spends her time working in the yard and participating in the Hale Mahaolu Senior Citizens' Lunch Program.

Tape No. 7-8-1-79 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Maki Nakamura (MN)

October 9, 1979

Kahului, Maui

BY: Haruo Yamamoto (HY) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Yoshiko Nishimoto.]

WN: This is an interview with Mrs. Maki Nakamura. Today is October 9, 1979, and we're at her home in Kahului, Maui.

HY: First of all, when were you born?

MN: Eighteen ninety-six [1896]. September 14.

HY: And your father and mother? What were they doing?

MN: My parents in Japan were farmers. Father did small business.

HY: What kind of business?

MN: A general store. They were selling sake . . . . Everything . . . . From sugar to pots and pans. It was a small store, but there were many things.

HY: Then, in present-day terms, it is the general store with everything . . .

MN: Yes. There were sake bottles even.

HY: Well, there was sake, medicine, plain socks and pants, food, drinks, tobacco, salt?

MN: No, not those things. Just, ah, sake, yarns, food, and drinks. Those kind of things. Many things . . . . Just the small general store. When I was twelve years old, father passed away, and in a short while, my older brother carried on the business.

HY: After your brother carried on, did you help?

MN: My mother passed away when I was fifteen years old, so I went out to work as a servant. I couldn't do farming work.

HY: You were twelve when your father died and fifteen when your mother died, so instead of staying at home, you went out to work?

MN: Yes. I went to gōka no sho. I don't think you know what gōka no sho is. In Shiga prefecture, the gōka no sho are rich homes with plenty of money, having a large clothing wholesale outlet in Kyoto and Osaka. I went to work for the Suzuki family at twelve.

I drank dobu sake, got drunk, and was laughed at by my father. (Laughs)

HY: Did you steal the drink?

MN: Yes. The house and store were separate, and when everybody stayed in the house, I went to the store and drank the dobu sake. It is the white sake. It tastes so good, so I drank and got drunk. (Laughs) I came home, and father laughed, saying, "What red face and unsteady walk . . . . " (Laughs)

HY: Your family did both farming and store?

MN: Yes.

HY: Who worked on the farm?

MN: Hired people and my uncle and aunt. I was still young, twelve years, so . . . .

HY: About when did you come to Hawaii?

MN: At twenty-five years and five months.

HY: You were born in 1896. So, it was about the year 1920. And where did you come?

MN: To Maliko, [Maui].

HY: Why did you come to Maliko?

MN: Well, I had a brother and sister, no parents. And my older sister was staying at home. I wanted to leave the house to work, but someone came over [i.e., a go-between] with a marriage proposal. My brother thought that I'd be ideal because my sister was staying at home. This person was a soldier.

HY: At that time, did you know what kind of a person your husband-to-be was?

MN: I wouldn't know. In Japan my brother did some investigating and found that my husband-to-be was a soldier of a higher rank. When he told his parents that he wanted to come to Hawaii, his father opposed and told him that he should stay at home. So, my husband

made arrangements to come to Hawaii without mentioning it to anyone.

HY: In other words, in the case of your family, he had army connections. However, he quietly made arrangements and came to Hawaii. Wasn't that the way it went?

MN: Yes.

HY: In the military rank, he was quite high. This is what it was, wasn't it? However, as a picture-bride marriage . . . .

MN: A picture bride! His picture was sent to me.

HY: Was he good-looking?

MN: (Laughs) Because he was good-looking, I said yes.

HY: After all, which was better? The picture or the actual person?

MN: It was the same.

(Laughter)

MN: He was much older. He was fourteen years older than I was.

HY: Ah, fourteen years?

MN: If a bride is sent, it is bad to send her back.

HY: If you were twenty-four, your husband must have been in his thirties.

MN: Yeah. He was fourteen years older. He was forty years old then.

HY: Forty? Your husband?

MN: Yeah.

HY: About thirty-eight?

MN: Yeah. In adding the year to my age [in the Japanese style], I was twenty-six, and my husband, I think, was said to be thirty-six or thirty-eight. He wasn't honest about his age.

HY: Is that right? So, anyway, you got married and came to Hawaii. Then your husband, at that time, was in Maliko?

MN: Yes.

HY: At that time, what was your husband's occupation?

MN: At that time, he was a cement worker.

HY: What kind of cement work was it?

MN: Digging a ditch. However, there were fifteen of them, and a person by the name of Ikeda was the boss at the time. In the Ikeda gang, I think there were about seventeen to eighteen or twenty. And so, my husband was about the top worker. I didn't know it was that type of work. We didn't know--since we stayed in the house--because we didn't see.

HY: But wasn't that work risky?

MN: Not at all. After it [the ditch] is dug, a pathway is built for the water to pass. I think it is for the water not to spill over, and for this reason, it is cemented.

HY: Well, then, when you first came to Maliko, you must have found that you had come to an extremely different place than you had imagined.

MN: I cried. (Laughs) I cried every morning [when MN first arrived]. Our house was made of rough pieces of board. Being a laborer--after the contract work was finished--we would move right away [to another location], so we could not build a nice house using new boards. After it [the house] is used, it is torn down, and they either sell it or give it away. Wherever we went, there was a place already built [for us].

HY: With rough boards?

MN: With rough board--they're built in tenement style, and you are able to see the things on the shelves of the next-door neighbor. The measurement of the wooden board used for the walls are all set, so there are small spaces in between.

HY: When you stand on the chair, the neighbor can be seen. You can peep in . . .

MN: Yeah, yeah. But we don't do such a thing . . . . Yes, we can see. But there was separate place called the long house for the single people. Only for men with no missus. A large long house, and they all slept in rows.

HY: When you came to Hawaii, you said you cried. Your husband must have had a bad time when you cried so much . . .

MN: Whenever my husband left the house, I cried. (Laughs) I couldn't very well cry when he was home. I felt lonely when he left.

HY: There was no electricity then?

MN: There were lamps [kerosene].

HY: What kind of meals did you have?

MN: For one month, because I didn't know how to cook, Mr. Kitagawa, who

is from the same prefecture as my husband, asked his cook to prepare my food. And my husband went there to eat, too. They made the lunch box, too. So, for one month, I hardly did anything.

They told me, "Mrs. Nakamura, don't only cry. Come over to my house."

I still remember the phrase, "kinan kei" ["come over"]. "Come over for a cup of coffee," I was told.

When I first came [to Hawaii], I was so lonely that I didn't know how to express my loneliness.

HY: In the first place, you didn't have any friends?

MN: There was no one. The people [in Maliko] were from Kumamoto and Hiroshima, so the dialect was entirely different from Shiga prefecture that it was hard to communicate.

In my prefecture [Shiga], there is a slight mixture of Kyoto dialect. However, it is not that way now. When I visit Japan, they say, "Auntie, your way of speaking is different now." And they laugh.

Even though I wanted to converse [with the people at Maliko], I couldn't. The Kumamoto dialect is rough. I didn't know how to reply. I felt hopeless in not being able to exchange greetings.

HY: You were only a young girl of twenty-four or twenty-five then. What was your enjoyment at that time?

MN: There wasn't any. (Laughs) It [Maliko] was near the valley in the mountains. After a month, my husband brought some pots and pans and told me to try and do something. And then he would leave. At least I could do something like that. My husband treated me well. While in Honolulu, he bought a big trunk and came back here, and he bought gifts for the people of the camps. He bought for me a bureau, kimonos and a sewing box from Honolulu. In those days, they even had Japanese sewing box.

HY: Were Japanese kimonos worn in those days?

MN: Japanese kimonos were worn.

HY: [HY is pointing to MN's dress.] Were you wearing dresses like this?

MN: We should have been wearing this. I brought over with me nothing but Japanese kimonos. I didn't know about dresses like this [i.e., MN's western-style dress].

HY: You had never worn a dress or a muumuu?

MN: I had never worn one nor knew what to call it.

HY: Your husband wasn't in kimono because of his work?

MN: My husband dressed the same way that you are dressed now. Pants and shirts. It's what you call horseback-riding pants.

HY: Do you have photos of those days? Do you have them with you?

MN: No. There wasn't anyone in those days who took pictures.

HY: It would be interesting if there were pictures to be shown. By the way, Oba-chan, how was your schooling in Japan?

MN: My schooling was until the fourth grade, and I graduated. Father told me it will be good if I became a nurse when I grew up and that I should continue to go to school. Just as I started going to school, he died. I went up to grade five but did not complete it. In the meantime, father passed away, and I did not want to become a nurse because I didn't understand. My father just talked about it, and I did not really know what nursing was all about.

[My husband] had finished high school and had been receiving a pension from the military. I think even when I came to Hawaii, he had been receiving a pension. My older brother took all this into consideration. Being from a farmer's family and not doing farm work, he thought it was best that I got married.

HY: As you had previously mentioned, when you first came to Hawaii, although it was a new house, you mentioned nagaya [long houses]. How many were there in the camp?

MN: They were in a row. There were fifteen in all, so there were only a few couples--about seven to eight couples.

HY: Seven to eight families?

MN: Yeah, yeah. It was about that number of families.

HY: Can a house of that sort be seen in this area now?

MN: No, there aren't any. Even though you want to see those type of houses, there aren't any around here.

HY: How many rooms were there?

MN: Only one [per dwelling]. We intended to stay just for a month or two.

HY: When you mean one house [dwelling], is it as large as this [meaning the size of the room they are in, about twelve feet by fifteen feet]?

MN: Yeah, it was about this size.

HY: Did you sleep on a bed?

MN: No. We spread a comforter on the floor. We stayed for only two to three months. We never stayed in one place more than three months.

HY: Was there a kitchen?

MN: There was a kitchen which was separate. It was outside, just as you stepped down. There was a kitchen for each household.

HY: Was there a bathroom?

MN: It was a big bathroom for everyone. There was someone to tend the bath fire.

HY: Was it only Japanese people?

MN: There was only us Japanese. So, there was no one else.

HY: Were you the only one from Shiga prefecture?

MN: From Shiga prefecture, only my husband and Mr. Kitagawa, whom I mentioned. There were people from Yamaguchi prefecture and Hiroshima prefecture, and there were quite a number from Kumamoto prefecture.

HY: At that time, where did you buy your food from?

MN: They were delivered from a store. Instead of going out to buy, someone came to take orders.

HY: From what store?

MN: From Kobayashi Store [in Kahului].

HY: About how many times a day?

MN: They came about two or three times a month. Kobayashi Store of Kahului was run by the father of the person who is running the potato chip shop at the present time.

HY: Besides foodstuff, where did you buy other things such as clothing and shoes?

MN: Things such as clothing and so forth, we went out to buy.

HY: At that time, there weren't any automobiles, were there?

MN: Even at that time, there were two or three persons with automobiles. They were small automobiles.

HY: Did your husband have one?

MN: No. Even in our camp, there was only one person who had a car. We borrowed that car, but we seldom went shopping. I imagine men

folks used the plantation truck often.

HY: For instance, what did you do during your days off or on Sundays?

MN: On a Sunday, the men folks all went gambling.

HY: And after that, did they all go drinking?

MN: My husband did not drink at all. When I decided to come to Hawaii, my brother told me, "If he is a gambler, return to Japan right away. I'll send you the money."

I didn't have any children yet, and I think about half a year later, after my arrival from Japan, I went to work in kimono at the Haiku Cannery. He said it was all right for me to go in kimono, so I clipped my kimono sleeves off and went to work. There was a dormitory and four to five ladies went there as a group. We went there with the intention of coming home on Saturdays and Sundays.

Upon returning, my husband wasn't around. It was on a Saturday. I wondered where he had gone. Everybody knew that I was opposed to my husband gambling. But I still asked, "Where did he go?"

I was fed up, and I told them I was going back to Japan. (Laughs) And I brought with me a big leather bag, and then I packed all of my kimonos. (Laughs) My husband had been letting me hold all the money, so I gathered as much as I could and went to Paia. At Morita Ryokan [Hotel] in Paia, I sent a telegram to my brother for money so I can return to Japan. I slung my bag over my shoulder and walked out. I was young in those days, and everybody walked. Even to the hospital, we all walked. Not only I. Everybody walked to go places.

HY: And then, what happened?

MN: By then, the boss, Mr. Ikeda, came chasing after me on his car.

HY: Was this the Mr. Ikeda of Ikeda Store [referring to Satoki Ikeda, another interviewee]?

MN: No. No connection. Mr. Ikeda went back to Japan and died in the atomic bomb. He immediately came after me, so I couldn't do anything. (Laughs) He took my bag, put it in his car, and said, "Let's go home." I reluctantly followed him and went home. My husband stopped gambling since.

HY: Very interesting . . .

MN: Those things happened long time ago. I had no children then, and I was alone at home. I remembered my brother saying, "If that man is a gambler, I'll send money, so come back right away."

HY: Besides Kobayashi Store, were there other stores that came by to

sell things?

MN: Mr. Inouye had a small store in the camp. I went there to buy fish, and meat, and so forth every day. Mr. Inouye operated a small store in Maliko. There were a few simple things for daily use, such as salt.

HY: For shopping, was it paid by cash?

MN: Some people charged and paid when the statement came.

HY: Your salary was one dollar a month, how often was it paid?

MN: Once a month.

HY: Well, then, where did you go after that?

MN: As I have told you, I went to Kailua for two to three months, and also to Camp 6. I really moved all over the place, two to three months at each place . . . . We all moved together and got used to it. We were able to talk with everybody.

At the beginning, there was a language barrier. Although all being Japanese, the language was entirely different from Shiga prefecture and Hiroshima prefecture. And Kumamoto dialect was rough. I can't imitate it. And when the Okinawa prefecture people spoke--in the beginning--I wondered, "What language can that be?" I couldn't understand it at all.

(Laughter)

MN: I came home and I was told that it was "Okinawa talk." And for the first time, I knew what it was.

HY: How did you all become friends?

MN: When we meet, we say, "Good morning." There was nothing to do, so we went hiking, and so forth, together.

HY: The women didn't work at all?

MN: Yes, we couldn't do anything special. Some ladies laundered the working men's clothes and got paid.

HY: And what did you do? As you have previously mentioned, you were first in Maliko. Where was the next place?

MN: To Kailua. Upper Paia . . . . Plantation houses were already there.

HY: You moved around so often that . . .

MN: And from there, we went to a place called Camp Kailua, and from

there, we went down to the cement mill [in Lower Paia]. Then we went to a place called Kiawe Camp, which was inside the kiawe bushes beyond Camp 6.

HY: Was this all related to your husband's work?

MN: We were all together [MN's husband's gang and their families]. We all went as a group. From the plantation we were transported on a truck. So, we did not have to do anything. Finally, we settled in Paia. We had already left the cement work and decided to do pineapple work.

HY: At that time, did you already have children?

MN: I had children at the time. I told you that we were in Kipahulu. At that time, my eldest son was about a year old.

HY: How many children do you have?

MN: At present, I have five. There were six to seven children, but two had died.

HY: Your husband had been doing cement work but he quit the cement work and started to do pineapple work. Why did he want to do pineapple work?

MN: There wasn't much cement work to do, so he thought of doing pineapple and tried his hand at pineapple work.

HY: Did he start this pineapple work on his own or did he work for someone?

MN: No, he bought his own place. He leased land owned by Hawaiians.

HY: How did you make out with the pineapple work?

MN: We failed, and all the pineapples rotted, and we did not make any money.

HY: Did you have any debts?

MN: No. We did not have any debts. We did not have even a debt of five cents.

HY: That's good.

MN: However, we lost all the money we had.

HY: And where did you go after that?

MN: Next we went to Lower Paia, and since he was unemployed, he worked for the government. While he was at that job, the war [World War II]

started and the plantation needed help, so he returned to plantation work again.

HY: During that time until the war started, how many years was he with government work?

MN: I guess it was from two to three years.

HY: At that time, you opened a store?

MN: Yes, yes. We went to Lower Paia, and I went out to sell tōfu. It was for one to two years. Not more than two years.

HY: Where about was the store located?

MN: Well, our house---where the fire engine [station] is now. There was a big house behind that. We bought the place and made tōfu there.

HY: You mean, where Dr. Ohata is now?

MN: Yes, next to Dr. Ohata. At present there are about four to five houses standing there. We were living there. We made tōfu for about two to three years while the children were small. And there was a lady there. While I was out selling, she came over to babysit. That is how I was able to go out and sell.

It was really troublesome to carry the load [of tōfu] when it rained, so I bought a car and learned to drive. After a short while, Mr. Takitani bought a [movie] theater there [nearby]. I started selling sweets there.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: How did you get started in the tōfu business?

MN: Someone [who previously lived in the house] was already doing it [i.e., making and selling tōfu]. The lady there left the place and asked my husband if he wanted to continue, so he said all right.

HY: That means this lady who was making the tōfu quit tōfu making?

MN: She didn't know what to do with the utensils and other facilities, so I took over.

HY: But you hadn't had any experience in tōfu making?

MN: But I was taught how to make. After all it was easy to make.

HY: Did everyone who ate the tōfu say it was delicious?

MN: (Laughs) We sold a lot. I placed it in a zaru [basket] and went selling house to house for ten miles. I used to walk a lot, before. The cost of tōfu was ten cents. Instead of buying the whole piece, [sometimes] they asked for only half, so I put half of it in a bowl and left. It was like that in the olden days. We made one box a day. About a dozen went into a box, so we made about $1.20 a day.

HY: Was your husband driving you at the time?

MN: No. Someone taught me how to drive. My husband did not drive.

HY: You were real modern to be driving and not your husband.

MN: Yeah. There weren't very many [women] who drove. There was a midwife called Mrs. Tsuchiya. She was about the only one who drove.

HY: So, someone taught you to drive?

MN: A person from Okinawa prefecture taught me. After a week, he said it was all right for me to drive.

HY: So you went around selling on the car?

MN: Yeah.

HY: Was it troublesome with water from cans of tōfu splashing?

MN: But they were placed in a tall can. At the time, I had already started making konnyaku and age.

HY: About how many tōfu did you make?

MN: We made only about a box [a day]. And Saturdays and Sundays were the only days we made aburage and konnyaku. In those days, it was hard to sell even a box that contained only twelve [tōfu]. We went around selling, and it cost only ten cents apiece.

HY: Did all of your children give a helping hand?

MN: Oh, yes. In the morning, when they got up. I think my daughter who is now in Honolulu was a fourth grader. We delivered to Dr. Ohata every single day because it was a hospital. So, it was delivered there every day, and also to Mr. Taura who owned a garage. To Mr. Taura and Mr. Kobayashi. Most of them bought from me. My daughter delivered one each only to our neighbors. She really helped me a lot.

HY: In selling those, were you paid right away?

MN: Most of them did, but there are people who still haven't paid me.

(Laughter)

MN: It's only a small amount. It was only a matter of fifty cents or a dollar in those days. I deliver every day, and [sometimes] they ask me to leave one tōfu, saying they do not have any small change. Again I go there to collect for the unpaid tōfu, but again I'm told to leave a block of tōfu, saying they do not have small change. It went on in such a manner. It was only a matter of fifty cents or a dollar, but it accumulated to quite a lot. (Laughs) It was interesting, though, when you think about it now.

HY: What made you turn to the [snack] shop in the movie theater?

MN: I quit tōfu making. I quit because tōfu did not keep for very long, and also my factory was so small. So, since the war [World War II] caused a labor shortage on the plantation, myself, my husband, and my children went to Camp 1 to work in the fields. At the same time, I started my candy store in Princess Theater. And since the movie theater was open only at nights, I could work on the plantation by day, and in my store by night.

HY: Your husband did not help the theater [shop] side at all?

MN: No. My husband didn't like it. He hated to go out into the crowd, so he did not go there as much. But after moving [to Princess Theater in 1941], he came to help me practically every night. The older children already left home, and population increased [i.e., military presence during World War II], so I needed help badly.

HY: Who did the buying for the store in the theater?

MN: I did all of the buying myself.

HY: Oh, you drove yourself?

MN: Yes.

HY: Where to?

MN: A store in Kahului on the way to the pier [Kahului HC&S Store]. There is a big building down there. That was the place I did the buying. They had everything there.

HY: At the time, were the workers all Japanese?

MN: No, haole.

HY: Were you able to converse?

MN: There were Japanese also. The Japanese people interpreted for me.

I think a person named Mr. [Carl] Heyer was the boss. He did not know my language much but was very nice to me. Even for one case of candies, he brought it over for me. He did so much. He was very nice to me.

HY: Were you asked by someone to run the store in the theater?

MN: No, I inquired with Mr. Takitani [owner of Princess Theater] and he said I could if I wanted to.

HY: Whose idea was it?

MN: It was my idea.

HY: You thought that a store in a theater might make out?

MN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HY: Who taught you?

MN: No, no. It was my idea. (Laughs) I did not have any trouble ever since I stopped tōfu and went into making potato chips [at the store in the movie theater]. My children came to help me and when they were not around, I hired help.

HY: Please wait. How long had you worked at the plantation?

MN: I worked two to three years. And then war started. A person called Mr. Yamamoto in Camp 1 had a store. He used to be the second boss. He was a nice person. He used to joke around a lot. Since Mr. Yamamoto had a store, I asked him to order a potato chip machine for me, and he said he would.

The machine was delivered to me on December 3, [1941], and just as I was about to start using it, the war started on the seventh. Since potatoes were mainly for soldiers [wartime rationing], we couldn't get them. So, the machine was kept in the house and wasn't used at all.

Mr. Heyer had bought a potato chip machine from Mr. Kobayashi [with the purpose of supplying soldiers with potato chips], and he became the boss [of Kahului Store] and let someone run it. I told Mr. Heyer to let me do it because I also have a machine at home. "Oh, very well, very well," said Mr. Heyer, and we had to have his signature.

We [aliens] couldn't do anything at the time because war had just started. He signed the paper for me, so I started right away this time. Since I started on this, I stopped working at the plantation.

HY: Is that right? Did you ask Mr. Yamamoto about having a machine of your own?

MN: No, Mr. Heyer, who was the big boss of the big store in Kahului, had to give out the paper with signature [permission]. Otherwise, we couldn't do anything at that time.

HY: That's when you started making potato chips, and you didn't even know how to make potato chips?

MN: I didn't know how. After I started making, I gradually learned how.

HY: Ah, did you see anyone making it?

MN: No. I didn't even go to see. I hated to copy others. I did it all by myself. Mr. Yamamoto ordered the bucket, paper, and the pot, and they were delivered to me by truck. I knew I could if I tried and tried. I did by thinking. The boys [MN's sons] washed the potatoes when they came home from school. They could only wash about one bag a day.

HY: Do you slice them?

MN: The machine does it. After the potatoes are placed in the machine, it slices it, and it drops into the oil. That is the pot we used to make potato chips. (MN points at pot.) That is the one.

HY: Which one?

MN: (MN points to the big kama [pot].) Oh, that is now used for catching water under the rain gutter. That used to be the pot to make potato chips. White gas was used to cook.

HY: How did you get the white gas?

MN: I went to buy it at the store, and I pumped it and somehow I was able to work it out.

HY: Where was your husband at the time?

MN: He goes to work every day.

HY: Did your husband help you?

MN: No. (Chuckles)

HY: Not at all?

MN: My husband was at work, so he was not home. So, I asked a woman by the name of Kubo who was jobless to put the chips in the package. The weight I used is still there. (MN points at it.) It was weighed on it. I had to do everything.

HY: What was the expense in processing potato chips? For instance, what did you buy?

MN: There wasn't much to buy. I bought oil from Paia Store. There was a person by the name of Mr. Matsumoto who was the boss of the store. He told me, "I will do anything you ask." When there was a shortage of oil [during the war], he sent me fifty barrels. He even ordered the potatoes [for me]. I asked him to deliver them to me by a truckload at a time.

HY: Where did you actually make the potato chips?

MN: I rented a small house next to a taxi stand in Lower Paia. There, I made potato chips.

HY: Did you pay a salary to the woman who helped you?

MN: Yes, I gave a little at a time.

HY: Did you earn much in selling potato chips?

MN: It was a great help. During the war, soldiers from Kailua [there was a camp for soldiers beyond Kailua] would order ten dozen [bags of potato chips] every day from there. The people [civilians] from Lower Paia wanted some, but we couldn't sell because we didn't have enough.

HY: You did not close the store at the time, did you?

MN: It was [open only] in the evening. Every evening. We did not close. When we close, we made potato chips, and when there was time, we also made sushi. We were able to do anything. We had the license, so we would go to the theater at night.

HY: At that time, you did not have a citizenship paper?

MN: Since I did not have [United States] citizenship, my daughter went to the army office. She got me a license to work after the curfew hour--from the mayor--until 10 o'clock [p.m.]. I was able to work like a Hawaii-born citizen, and I stayed at the movie house until 10 o'clock. The Japan-born [alien] couldn't stay out after 8 o'clock. A Japan-born couldn't even go out of the house after 8 o'clock.

HY: From what time till what time were you at the movie house?

MN: I went there from 6 [o'clock p.m.] to about 10.

HY: What time did you start making potato chips in the morning?

MN: I started about 7 [o'clock a.m.]. Kobayashi Theater, the lease expired after five years [1936-1941], so we had moved to Princess Theater. The lease was only for five years. We moved to Princess Theater in the year when the bombs were dropped [1941]. We moved on November 19, and the war started on December 7.

HY: Was it under the same ownership?

MN: No. Mr. Takitani bought the property and built it, so the Princess Theater belongs to Mr. Takitani.

HY: Mr. Kobayashi operated the former theater?

MN: Mr. Kobayashi only owned the land. Mr. Takitani of Wailuku had leased for five years [and had a movie theater there]. Then he started his own movie theater [Princess Theater] there.

HY: In that case, you would open a shop in the movie theater and you cannot get all the benefits, can you?

MN: They were mine. I bought it and I was operating it. I paid only the rent.

HY: How much rent did you pay?

MN: It was inexpensive at that time. It was $12.50 [a month]. At night it was troublesome to sell sushi there, so I changed to making sandwiches, which sold very good. There was a time when I sliced fifty loaves of bread a day.

HY: Who were the people that came to see the movie?

MN: Lots of soldiers came as a group. There were many soldiers--some returning from Guam and some young . . .

HY: Were ordinary people able to go in?

MN: Civilians go in, too, but mainly soldiers.

HY: Until war broke out, ordinarily, only the neighbors patronized the movie theater, wasn't that it? There weren't any soldiers around, were there?

MN: There were no soldiers anywhere. However, only nineteen days after it [Princess Theater] was built, for the first time--in December--war broke out. There was only one month in between.

HY: How were things when it was operated on the old side with Mr. Kobayashi who had leased it?

MN: At that time [before war broke out], either a small amount of peanuts, or two or three bottles of soda water or gum were sold. But we were [still] selling tōfu [then], and the children were small. The children could go in [the theater] free. My husband did not have to pay [for them]. With that in mind, I opened a shop there.

I sold even though it was a small place and only by the light of

the sign lamp [of the theater]. There was only a small amount of gum and candies to sell. When we moved to the Princess Theater site, it was a little more spacious.

HY: What did you sell at the Princess Theater?

MN: Potato chips, soda, candy. We also sold shaved ice.

HY: But you can't do it with you alone, can you?

MN: Since I was alone and it was nighttime, my husband came over to help. From chewing gum to candies, we sold everything. Sold a lot of shaved ice, particularly on Sundays. There wasn't enough ice cream and shaved ice, so I had to go to Wailuku to get it.

HY: Weren't your goods sold only to people who came into the theater?

MN: No. Anybody [could come in]. Even [people from] the outside.

They came for shaved ice, saying, "Give me some shaved ice, Oba-san."

And I would say, "All right," and shave for them.

HY: Where in the theater was the store located?

MN: The entrance is right there [in front of the street, alongside the theater entrance], so they would come in.

HY: The people are in the movie theater, and they pay when they go in the theater. Is it all right for those people to come and buy even though they do not go in the theater?

MN: Our store is located outside. (MN refers to snapshot.) I think there's the picture house here, and it's written, "Princess Theater." This is the entrance to our store and this is Princess Theater. People come out and buy, the entrance being different. This side is our entrance and the other side is the entrance to the theater. Anybody can go in.

HY: The store is outside the theater, then?

MN: Yeah, being a small store. (MN examines photo.) This is a sailor who is standing here.

HY: Who could this be? This person?

MN: This is Yoshie who is in Wailuku--she got married--when she was still a single girl. I remember her name has a "bamboo" character. My husband stood here. My husband stood here since the door was on the outside.

HY: Well, then even the people passing by are able to buy?

MN: Anybody who wants to buy bought from us.

END OF INTERVIEW

STORES and STOREKEEPERS of Paia & Puunene, Maui

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa

June 1980